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Information received from non-governmental organizations

Note by the Secretariat

In its report on its third session, held from 10 to 21 May 2004, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues identified proposals, objectives, recommendations and areas of possible future action and, through the Economic and Social Council, recommended that States, organizations of the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations, indigenous peoples and non-governmental organizations assist in their realization. Information received in this regard from non-governmental organizations is contained in the present document and its addenda.

* E/C.19/2005/1.

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Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and the Elizabeth Seton Federation*

Statement on Millennium Development Goals and indigenous peoples

The present statement is submitted to the fourth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 16-27 May 2005, related to item 3 of the provisional agenda, "Millennium Development Goals and indigenous peoples", with special emphasis on the eradication of extreme poverty.

1. As international non-governmental organizations involved in social services with many indigenous communities across the world, we welcome attention to the theme of poverty eradication in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.

2. In relation to this, we would like to note the following points that, from our experience, we know are essential for human development, especially in relation to indigenous populations, which have been among the most marginalized within national frameworks and programmes.

- Poverty among indigenous populations certainly relates to scarcity of material and economic resources. But often, and more significantly for indigenous communities, poverty relates to the human condition of exclusion and marginalization. It relates to lack of political participation and effective control over their lives and environments as well as the self-determination of their own communities.

3. We know from grass-roots work in the Philippines that Governments sometimes intrude on indigenous communities with development projects without consultation or understanding local needs. We are aware of one community where land rights of the indigenous community are being ignored or violated by local governments while at the same time the Government has imposed a housing development that is not needed by the community. In fact, this type of imposed housing breaks down traditional relations and the customs of the community.

- Development programmes that aim to reduce poverty in indigenous communities must include full participation of and decision-making by the communities involved. Without effective participation, indigenous communities are reduced to mere objects. In fact, indigenous communities have unbreakable bonds of relationship with nature as well as ancient wisdom that predate the organization of global nation states. We remind this Forum that the material scarcity found among many indigenous groups is a direct result of the pillaging, colonizing, exploitation and domination of their lands and traditional ways of life. Such exploitation has been perpetrated by legitimate nation states.

4. We are aware of indigenous communities across the world that work diligently and creatively in microenterprise projects and have developed forms of agricultural cooperatives. But in the globalized world of today, they are often pressed into the depths of degradation through systems of prostitution and trafficking or through engaging children in street vending and begging. Such economic struggles go on, while the dominant culture expands various tourist enterprises or corporate

* Non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

development schemes all around them. Lack of inclusion in community development and such unevenness in the sharing of resources and profit demonstrate the ongoing injustice of cultural domination, an insidious form of poverty.

– Wherever poverty eradication and human development are being considered, it is imperative to consider the disproportionate exploitation of women and girl children. Women and girls ought to be key actors in solution-based strategies.

5. In the struggle for land and water rights by the communities in Amazonia in Brazil, it has been women activists who have influenced the male leadership of their own communities to consider the long-term impact of deforestation and the short-term and short-sighted benefit of selling lands for "development". Women have led the way to protest corporate encroachment on the rain forest and its life-sustaining, planet-sustaining environment. Just recently, world attention was brought to this issue when a religious woman, who had been involved in this very struggle for over 30 years, was murdered point blank by those who would destroy communal homes and sustainable lands in exchange for immediate economic profit.

6. The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals depends upon all. The contributions and needs of the world's indigenous populations are essential components of success. To this end our recommendations are simple. We recommend that national Governments:

(a) **Declare formal recognition of past injustices and past practices that have caused the multifaceted impoverishment of indigenous communities; reaffirm publicly the value of indigenous communities to the national and international welfare;**

(b) **Ensure the full participation of indigenous communities in any and all policy development and decision-making that relates to any particular indigenous community, land or environment. Such participation, to be meaningful, must exist at the very beginning of policy formation and continue through to project end. This may require resources allocated for items such as translation processes between indigenous languages and the dominant national language;**

(c) **Support the dissemination of successful indigenous development projects. Build on best practices rather than on academic or political theory. Focus on the principles of grass-roots development, local ownership and human and cultural development that is integrated with economic prosperity, creativity and a diversity of project development. Many indigenous communities and non-governmental organizations are ready partners when such endeavours demonstrate good will, and freedom from political corruption, military domination and controlled bureaucratic procedures;**

(d) **Include gender review processes in all development projects to ensure the participation and leadership of women as central agents and protagonists of human development.**

7. With the effective partnership of all, it is possible to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It is possible to build another world, a world consistent with the United Nations vision of universal human rights, global peace and the eradication of extreme poverty.